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The purpose was to draw some relationship between poverty and behavior, specifically analyzing the direct and indirect effects of inadequate income on low-income mothers' child-rearing priorities and on relationships between parents.

Low-income mothers show considerable satisfaction with the child-rearing role, but feel themselves least adequate to provide for the children the things that they are most concerned about--the children's present and future life positions.

Definition of the husband and father as good or bad is related directly to the amount and flow of income, and especially to the way in which the available income is handled. The instability of many low-income families is due less to lack of recognition of, and affirmation of, so-called middle-class values than to the financial capability to support these values and to afford the tastes and wishes that bind the poor inextricably to the larger society.

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POVERTY AND THE BEHAVIOR OF LOW INCOME FAMILIES*

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Within a single generation, two official wars on domestic want have been declared -- War on Poverty I, in 1932, and War on Poverty II, in 1964. A harbinger of the Second War on Poverty was widening recognition that unemployment and inadequate wages amidst the affluence between two wars on poverty had crippled many parents' abilities to carry out family responsibilities and clouded their children's futures.

There are many who have been witnesses to, and soldiers in, two major wars against poverty in their time. And there are many persons who have been working to add to the stockpiles of knowledge about the poor and poverty-making forces since that first war on poverty. Despite all this, there is a serious question whether military intelligence about the nature of the enemy, poverty, is any more accurate or useful today than it was a generation ago. We are still not sure whether the poor are misunderstood hard luck good guys, or unreconstructed no good bad guys. The arguments in the revived debate over whether poverty is the fault of poor people themselves are basically unchanged. I. M. Rubinow's comments in the early 1930's on the running controversy about whether poverty is caused by personal or by social factors would need little, if any updating today:

> An analysis of the arguments supporting either of these views to the exclusion of the other readily shows that back of ostensibly scientific differences...are differences primarily in attitudes towards procedures designed to correct the situation. Assumption of social or objective

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Bennett O. Stalvey

> responsibility serves as a starting point for the development of plans for social amelioration, whereas emphasis upon personal subjective responsibility tends to serve as a bulwark against state intervention.
>
> ...Many of the earlier attitudes or even the ostensibly scientific explanations offered at the present time are probably based upon the same need of waiving responsibility for the existence of poverty in the midst of plenty or wealth.
>
> * * *
>
> What all...attitudes have in common is that they view poverty as an evil which must be either fought or explained away as inevitable.[1]

Today, as yesterday, whether the purpose is to fight poverty or to explain it, the task is often made more difficult by popular labels and scientific concepts that tend to make the differences between the poor and the non-poor seem larger than they are. The separating effects of the poverty label are reinforced by invidious notions of social and moral worth. Mechanistic views of the effects of poverty along with old and new stereotypes of the poor tend to encourage dubious, and frequently bitter, prescriptions for helping and for changing people who are poor.

In this paper we will present selected aspects of a current intensive study of low income families[2] in Washington, D. C. that we think are pertinent to efforts to understand the exceedingly complex relationships between contemporary poverty and behavior. Our specific interest is in sharing some tentative clues that are emerging, as our analysis proceeds, about the direct and indirect effects of inadequate income on (1) low income mothers' child rearing priorities and on (2) relationships between parents.

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The discussion in this paper is based upon some of the early results of analysis of the intensive first-hand field reports and of the comprehensive family ratings of 39 selected families.[3]

In this collection of 39 rated families, 32 (approximately 4 in 5) are Negro and 7 are white. Seventeen (slightly more than 2 in 5) of these families have one parent figure in the household, in 15 (approximately 3 in 8) cases a female, and in 2, a male. Twenty-two (more than one-half) of the families have both male and female figures in the household.

There are a total of 178 children, 18 years and under, in these 39 families -- the number of children per family ranges from 1 to 9, with an average of 4.6.

Estimated annual family income ranges from under $2,000 to slightly more than $6,000 in the case of one family.[4] (This last family's income picture changed radically just before the end of field contacts when the wife received a temporary government appointment. Prior to that the family income, based upon the mother's earnings as a domestic and the sometime employment of the semi-literate father,was less than $3,000 per year.) Thirteen, or one-third, of the families have incomes under $3,000. Estimated median family income for these 39 families is $3,500.

Nearly 500 field contacts were made with these 39 families. The average number of contacts per family is 12.5; the range is 3 to 25 contacts.

A number of strong general impressions emerged from early analysis of our materials. One is that the amount of diversity among low income families is too frequently underrated and overlooked in popular and scientific thinking; another is that a great deal of behavior among low

income families reflects a straddling of deprivation and poverty and the better life and new affluence; and still another has to do with the strongly pragmatic -- and even non-class, non-cultural, non-ideological, just plain human -- cast of much of low income behavior.[5]

These impressions, and in particular the proposition that there is marked variability in family behavior and values, continue to get strong support in the analysis of the family ratings that is now underway. These quantitative data that are being analyzed now include IBM machine-processed ratings for 39 families in 19 major categories involving or affecting child rearing functions. For each family, there is a possible total of 3,500 items, each rated on a 5-point scale, A to E.

Analysis of the ratings of mothers' or mother substitutes' performances in selected child rearing areas in relation to welfare status, income, education, size of family, life cycle, presence of one or two parents, and housing is underway or planned. The analysis is incomplete; yet it is possible to get indications now of the distribution of child rearing concerns of mothers, and of the relative emphasis mothers place on various child rearing activities.

There are many popular assumptions and considerable discussion in the literature about the confidence and competence of low income mothers. Our materials indicate that mechanistic interpretations of the effects of low income on self-views of mothers and the stereotypes of the inadequate low income mother need modification. When proportions are used to describe the total spectrum of behavior among low income families, the picture is different and therefore more useful for understanding the poor, and for planning action programs. When A and B ratings are defined

as high, C as medium, and D and E as low, approximately 3 in 5 of these 41 study mothers or substitutes are rated high in self appraisal, and, 1 in 2 high in self esteem; by comparison 1 in 5 of the subjects rates low in self appraisal and 1 in 5 low in self esteem. The proportions of mothers rated low or lacking in emotional response, concern, self appraisal, and self esteem all fall in the 15-to 20 per cent range.

Our analysis of the ratings indicates that these low income mothers show considerably more satisfaction with the child rearing role than they do with the present life position and outlook for their children.

Following is the distribution of high, medium, and low ratings in seven selected areas of child rearing behavior for 41 mother figures in 39 households:

Child rearing behavior	Rating level	Approximate proportions
Concern, education of children	Moderate; balanced	4 in 5
	High, intense	----
	Very little; none	1 in 5
Concern, general	Moderate; balanced	3 in 5
	High, intense	1 in 7
	Very little; none	1 in 5
Self appraisal	High	3 in 5
	Medium	1 in 4
	Low	1 in 6
Self esteem	High	1 in 2
	Medium	1 in 4
	Low	1 in 5
Emotional response	High	2 in 5
	Medium	2 in 5
	Low	1 in 5

Child rearing behavior	Rating level	Approximate proportions
Satisfaction with child rearing role	High	2 in 5
	Medium	1 in 3
	Low	1 in 4
Satisfaction, present life position of children	High	1 in 8
	Medium	1 in 2
	Low	3 in 8

There are indications of substantial concern among low income parents precisely in those areas that have to do with respectability, achievement, and physical support and maintenance of children. The substantial concerns about education, character development, present life position of children, future life position of children, physical care and control are distributed among all categories of the study population. What the parents do about these concerns and can do about them, may be different matters.

Our analysis thus far, makes possible tentative formulations of the rank orders of what low income mothers see as most important for them to do or accomplish in child rearing, of their self appraisal of their abilities to perform or achieve in various child care areas, and of the satisfactions they derive from various child rearing activities or responsibilities. Analysis also indicates that income differences within the low income range are likely to make significant differences in child rearing priorities.

Ratings have been made of the parents' concern, self appraisal, satisfaction, and adequacy or effectiveness with respect to individual children in thirteen child rearing areas. Selected for brief consideration here are concern, self appraisal, and satisfaction ratings in eight

of these: physical care, emotional care, control, character development, educational values, sex training.

By our definition, the most favorable rating level for concern is the middle rating or C. This represents concern that on the whole is balanced. The A and B ratings, high, represent intense concern; and the D and E ratings, low, represent little or no concern.

A tentative rank order of concerns about the care of children based on the approximate proportions of the 178 children rated in C, the most favorable level for concern, would be as follows:

future life position
character development
education
physical care
emotional care
control
present life position
sex training

Future life position, character development, and educational values -- central in what are usually referred to as middle class values -- are matters of favorable concern for approximately 7 in 10 of the children for whom there are ratings. They are matters of little or no parental concern in the case of 20 to 25 per cent of the children.

In the cases of approximately 1 in 3 of the children, ratings indicate that the present life position is a matter of intense concern for parents and in the cases of 1 in 7 children, a matter of little or no concern.

In the 13 families with incomes of less than $3,000, concern about the present life position of children shares top ranking with concern about character development. Further, in the families with incomes under $3,000, mothers' or mother substitutes' concerns about the future life position of children have a higher rank order than in families with incomes over $3,000.

The approximate proportions of children affected by the three levels of concern in eight selected child rearing areas are shown below:

Approximate proportions of children affected:

Areas	Moderate balanced concern	High, intense concern	Very little or no concern
Future life position	7 in 10	1 in 12	1 in 5
Character development	7 in 10	1 in 30	1 in 4
Educational values	7 in 10	1 in 80	1 in 4
Physical care	2 in 3	1 in 8	1 in 4
Emotional care	2 in 3	1 in 50	1 in 3
Control	3 in 5	1 in 5	1 in 7
Present life position	1 in 2	1 in 3	1 in 7
Sex training	2 in 5	1 in 14	1 in 2

The limited analysis of ratings of low income parents' performance with individual children indicate that the mothers are likely to rate themselves as most adequate in control, character development, education and physical care of children and least effective with respect to future life position, sex training and present life position. In other words,

it appears that they rate themselves as least adequate in two of the things they are most concerned about -- present and future life positions of their children.

High self appraisal ratings are consistently less frequent among the families with incomes under $3,000. The biggest differences between the income groups in self appraisal ratings appear to be with reference to the present life position of children and to the physical care of children. Mothers and mother substitutes in the under $3,000 families have less confidence in their ability to do anything about the present life position of their children and to provide physical care for them.

A hypothetical rank order of areas of self-rated child rearing competence and confidence among low income families follows:

control
character development
educational values
physical care
emotional care
future life position of children
sex training
present life position of children

The following is a hypothetical rank order of satisfactions obtained by mothers or mother substitutes in these same areas of child care and responsibility:

character development
physical care
educational values

control

emotional care

sex training

future life position

present life position

The incomplete analysis suggests that mothers in families with incomes of less than $3,000 consistently receive less high satisfaction in 7 of the 8 selected areas of child care and responsibility. The one area of responsibility in which there appears little, if any, difference in the incidence of high satisfaction is with respect to educational values.

Approximate proportion of children affected:

Areas	Income, over $3,000	Income, under $3,000
Character development	3 in 4	1 in 10
Physical care	2 in 3	1 in 4
Emotional care	2 in 5	1 in 33
Control	2 in 5	1 in 5
Educational values	2 in 5	1 in 3
Future life position	2 in 5	1 in 13
Sex training	1 in 2	1 in 10
Present life position	1 in 5	-----

High satisfaction ratings in the under $3,000 category for emotional care, character development and future life positions are very scant; and there are no high ratings with regard to satisfaction with present

life position of children in the under $3,000 category. The indications of the areas of child care in which income makes a difference are particularly suggestive, inasmuch as they may be reflecting, in part at least, the effect of inadequate income and lack of work for the male on parental relationships and stability -- a topic which we consider next.

Qualitative analysis of field reports for the 39 selected families shows that relations between low income parents, and wives' and mothers' definitions of good and bad husbands and fathers, are particularly responsive to the amount and flow of income, and especially to the way in which the income available is handled.

Among other things our field materials suggest: (1) a major concern of the low income wife or mother is with a man's ability to "take care of" or to "be responsible for" his family financially; (2) the low income wife and mother's image of a "good man" is likely to be more practical than romantic or idealistic, and (3) a major factor in the survival of marriages among low income families is the effective control of money.

The following report on a community services workshop that was held recently in a major industrial center is an example of the way in which we think old and new stereotypes of the poor and a mechanistic view of the effects of poverty foster dubious and bitter prescriptions:

> Mr.___then gave the concluding address speaking first of the concepts and the hard realities of community planning and coordination. He discussed six approaches to meeting poverty and social maladjustment, namely, religious, anthropological, sociological, economic, psychological and cultural. The Consolidated Services concept uses all six approaches. He then named several middle class values which we try to inculcate in the families to be helped:
>
> To be industrious; to work is virtuous.

To have respect for property and its care.

To be educated; the more the better

Cleanliness for the person, home and neighborhood.

The man is responsible for the support of his family.

Any prescription for the poor that stems from a diagnosis that the importance of work, education, and of the male's responsibility for the support of the family -- "middle class values" -- are not recognized by fathers and mothers in families affected by "poverty and social maladjustment", comes close to being a nostrum. Any effort "to inculcate" the "middle class values" mentioned above, would be a particularly bitter and wrong prescription for the families in which no work or inadequate income while working have undermined the man's ability to support the family, and possibly led to a breakup of the family.

In the 39 families under consideration there is a reported history of 44 marriages, 23 of which have been terminated by separation, desertion, or divorce. The time invested in these marriages prior to their dissolution ranges from 1 to 19 years. Four out of every five of these marriages lasted four or more years. Furthermore, most of these marriages are described as having had a good beginning. These two factors alone suggest that the problem is not one of inculcating marriage values as these already exist; rather it is one of focusing attention on the ways and means for the young adult to meet the demands of marriage and not become a marriage dropout.

It is probably not insignificant that in approximately 1 in 3 cases the wife was pregnant at the time of separation or desertion. A major point of pressure for the low income male appears to be an increase in family size with no comparable increase in family income or earning capacity. One mother reports:

> I have heard fathers of children say, 'I had to leave home because the wife had too many children and too many children were too much pressure on me.'

Our data suggest that the low income wife or mother is not only concerned with the male's ability to take care of his family but also that she is more likely to be interested in the amount the husband or father makes than in the kind of job he has. This outlook, in our view, reflects a kind of rational assessment of what low income males are likely to be able to deliver more than anything else. This persistent strand of realism -- and this is not to be confused with indifference, apathy, self-pity, or self hatred -- is shown by one mother, who,in referring to her husband and the types of jobs he can get, said:

> When you ain't got no education, you have to take what you can get.

Another mother explained her husband's and other men's drinking:

> The men try to find something with which to ease their minds....They all wants things that they cannot get.

The responses, unsolicited as well as solicited, of wives and mothers indicate the rank order of desired characteristics in their male spouses to be:

> adequate work and income
>
> assistance in the care of children

setting a good example for the children

reciprocal trust and understanding

Like the "good man" image, the "no good" man image has a broad base in our field materials. It is primarily related to the experiences of wives with husbands from whom they are now separated. Responses indicate that the rank order of negative traits in husbands is:

lack of adequate work and income

inability to handle money properly

problem drinking

active interest in other women

There is nothing distinctive about this list itself. It is practically identical with the usual lists found in discussions of middle class family problems.

The delineation of the "good man" and the "no good man" image does not mean that there is a rigid dichotomy. In practice, the views that most women have of men in general, as well as specific men, are mixed, variable and sometimes composed of sharply conflicting elements.

In a high proportion of marital breakups that occurred among study families, the wife either left or asked the husband to leave. One crucial difference between the middle and upper income husbands and the low income husbands is that the former have better chances of holding jobs and providing for their families and thus meeting basic material obligations. There is much evidence that wives of all levels, and certainly many low income wives, will settle for this, if need be. However, low income wives do not have the same chance to settle for

basic material needs; therefore, the difference between the middle and upper income wife's staying and the low income wife's leaving -- or asking the husband to leave -- is often one of income and its management.

Among study families there appears to be a relationship between stability and satisfaction in the marriage and whether the wife either controls or shares significantly the disbursement of the limited money.

The manner in which inadequate income induces tension in a family situation is suggested in this excerpt from field notes relating to a family of 8 with an annual income of approximately $4,100:

> Mrs. Upshur said that she and her husband were usually happier just before pay day than on pay day. She said that her husband was always tense whenever pay day came.... He said that he always had to worry about spreading the money he made out to cover their bills and he and Mrs. Upshur usually had arguments over what to pay, what to buy, what not to pay and buy. After the money was gone, they didn't have this problem and they began to get back to normal. He was always happy when pay day had come and gone. Then he began to get 'keyed up' again when it was time for him to get paid. Mrs. Upshur said, 'We go through this every two weeks.'

In 8 of the 11 marriages that are judged as stable and marked by positive husband-wife relations, the wives control the disbursement of money. A comparison of the management of money in the marriages judged stable with those judged relatively unstable, indicates a higher proportion of unstable marriages when husbands control money than when wives control. Among the possible factors operating, is the likelihood that the wife, more oriented to the home, is more committed to see that the basic survival needs are met out of limited income; and

that the man, less oriented to the home, is more likely to surrender to other pulls. In two instances among the relatively unstable marriages, car purchases created or increased the marital problems. The wives' specific economic complaints characteristically feature inabilities to meet basic physical needs -- food, rent, clothing for children -- rather than inabilities to get dresses or hats for themselves, for example.

One popular explanation of the low income man who turns control of his money over to his wife is that he is a passive male who has knuckled under to a dominant woman, possibly a representative of the matriarchy. However, another explanation may be equally plausible, and that is there is mutual recognition that the wife can manage the limited income better than he can.

An added thought about the effects of income on family relationships stems from the fact that a good proportion of the out-of-wedlock children are born to separated and divorced women, particularly in the low income population. When income and work for the male are considered as factors, there is immediately suggested a possible shift in focus from thinking of much illegitimacy as related to a supposed absence of moral and cultural values to thinking of goodly portions of it as related to the absence of money for divorce or the lack of incentive for divorce because of the depressed lot of the low income male. This suggests that the best hope for a decrease in illegitimacy rates does not lie solely in the provision of sex education, diaphragms, or pills to the poor. Rather, it undoubtedly lies in improvement of the income earning status of the young adult male.

Our materials suggest that erosion and failures in many low income families are due less to lack of recognition of, and affirmation of, so-called middle class values than they are to lack of the wherewithal to support these values and to afford the tastes and wishes that bind the poor inextricably to the large society. The tragedy of most of the low income parents we have been studying is just this unremitting tension between their desire, particularly for their children, and their ability.

FOOTNOTES

1. I. M. Rubinow, "Poverty," Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Macmillan Company, New York, 1933, Vol. 12, pp. 288-289.

2. A 5-year project, sponsored by the Health and Welfare Council of the National Capital Area, and supported by Mental Health Project Grants, 5-R11-MH 278-5, from the National Institutes of Health, U. S. Public Health Service, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The operating title is "Child Rearing Practices Among Low Income Families in the District of Columbia." The project is now in its fifth year.

3. The project staff has collected intensive first-hand material descriptive of child rearing practices and of the factors affecting child development in two waves of field work -- the first lasted from January 1960 to August 1961, and the second from January 1962 to August 1963. The purpose of the latter was to gather additional and supplementary material on the low income adult male as husband and father. During the first wave of field work, observations were made of 58 low income families. Comprehensive family ratings were done for approximately 50 of these families. The family ratings of 39 families, selected from this group because of the completeness of the field reports and the number of contacts, have been IBM machine-processed. These are the data referred to here.

4. Our data collection was guided by a definition of low income rather than a definition of poverty. Since we were interested in observing "high" low income families as well as "low" low income families the ceiling chosen for family income was the U. S. Department of Labor's "modest but adequate" level for a family of four in Washington, D. C.

   Leon Keyserling calls the families that are above poverty and below "modest but adequate" "deprived."

   See Poverty and Deprivation in the United States: The Plight of Two-Fifths of a Nation, Conference on Economic Progress, Washington,D.C., 1962.

   The table below gives the income distribution of the 39 rated families:

Estimated annual family income	Number of families
Under $2,000	7
$2,000 - 2,999	6
$3,000 - 3,999	16
$4,000 - 4,999	5
$5,000 - 5,999	4
$6,000 and over	1

5. See Hylan Lewis, "Child-Rearing Practices Among Low Income Families," in Case Work Papers, 1961: From the National Conference on Social Welfare, Family Service Association of America, New York, 1961; Elizabeth H. Ross, "Comments on Child Rearing Practices Among Low Income Families in the District of Columbia," a paper presented before the National Conference on Social Welfare, Minneapolis, May 16, 1961...." (mimeographed); and Hylan Lewis, "Culture, Class and the Behavior of Low Income Families," a paper prepared for the Conference on Lower Class Culture, sponsored by National Institute of Mental Health and New York Youth Commission, New York City, June 27-29, 1963 (mimeographed, and to be published in a volume edited by Arthur Pearl).